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## Summer Notes From a Santa Barbara Garden

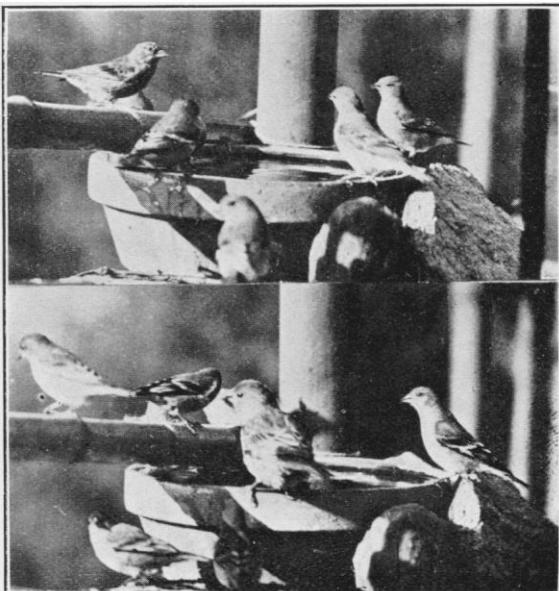
BY JOSEPH MAILLIARD

NEVER before has it been my good fortune to have such an opportunity to observe the birds in their relation to what might be called artificially natural conditions—such as a garden well-supplied with water in a dry country presents—as the past summer has afforded. A severe attack of pneumonia in the spring made an idle summer a necessity, and Santa Barbara was chosen as the place for my convalescence.

During my previous sojourn in this locality bird life had been remarkably scarce on account of previous dry seasons. The rainy season of 1904-5, however, was a generous one, and in consequence the whole country put on a glorious aspect of prosperity. The insect world appreciated this and luxuriated in it. In turn the birds not only appeared in unusual quantities but the spring residents worked early and late, and most successfully, at rearing large families while the good time lasted.

During the early summer birds were everywhere, busy as bees, and seemed reluctant to commence their southern journey when the time was ripe. As water was running in the streams until well into the summer such things as artificial pools were not greatly in demand at once, but as the season waxed and waned and the streams dried up, the feathered tribe became more and more appreciative of what kind-hearted and interested people did for them in the way of supplying liquid refreshments to the thirsty multitudes. Then it was that such things as old Indian mortars under dripping hydrants became exceedingly popular, and, in fact, any leaky spot in an exposed pipe and every dripping faucet in a place even if only at intervals undisturbed by people passing, had its patrons. It was no unusual thing to see a line of green-backed goldfinches, for instance, awaiting their turn to hang upside down on the faucet and let the cooling water fall into their open bills, drop by drop. And often the drops came very slowly.

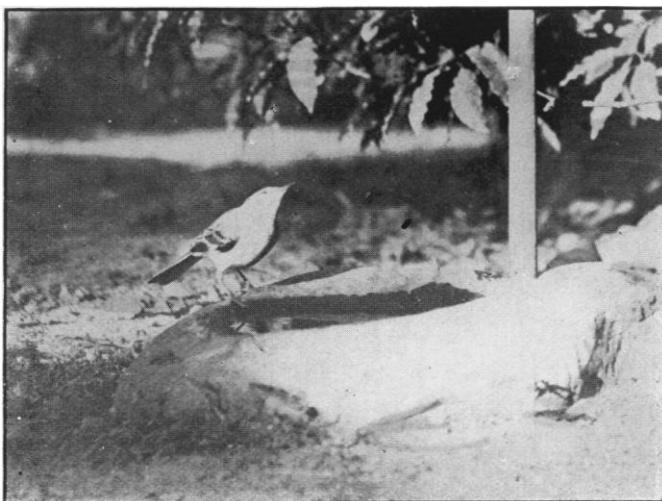
Around these oases where the birds gathered, many interesting sights were to be seen, and the traits of different species could be readily compared. Even individual characteristics could occasionally be distinguished. During the absence of larger birds the Anthony towhee (*Pipilo fuscus senicula*) was the "boss," and while in possession of a drinking fountain it behooved smaller birds to stand aloof. Often one of these towhees would hop on that particular Indian mortar where most of my observations were carried on, doing everything very deliberately, take



GREEN-BACKED GOLDFINCHES

a sip of water and then take a rest, another sip and another rest, finally settling himself in the water for a good bath. After splashing about to his heart's content he would come out to preen himself for awhile, and if no other birds were about would take his departure in due course of time. But if smaller birds came around he would repeat the whole performance, while perhaps around him—but not *too* near—stood a thirsty group of house finches (*Carpodacus mexicanus frontalis*), and the bush overhanging the bowl supported an equally impatient crowd of green-backed goldfinches (*Astragalinus psaltria hesperophilus*). The poor things often had to wait a good long while, and now and again a more adventurous one would dare to approach the water only to receive a vigorous attack from Mr. Towhee for his temerity. It was a veritable case of "dog in the manger."

The most amusing of all the birds noted in this garden were the wren-tits (*Chamæa fasciata*). These little fellows seemed to be actually clown-like in their antics, and in this spot had but little fear of human beings, often feeding within three or four feet of persons who were sitting comparatively still, tho perhaps



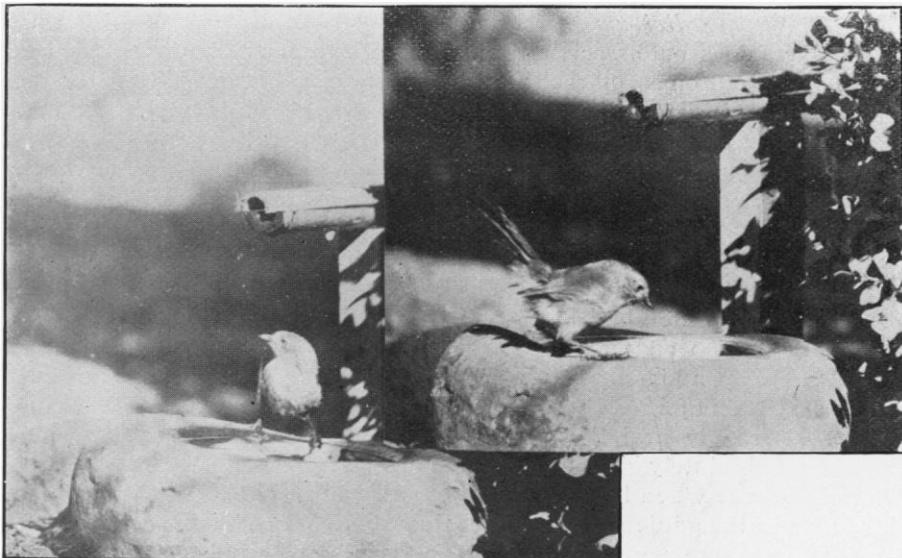
MOCKINGBIRD SWALLOWING

conversing in an ordinary tone of voice. The berries of the pepper tree seemed to have a great attraction for them and they would stuff themselves with these until it seemed as if they would burst. And apparently the berries made them very thirsty, for they would often stop the stuffing process long enough to fly to the nearest water for a drink.

Close to the ground and near one of the pepper trees under which I often sat in the afternoons was a two-inch fire hydrant which was at such a height that a wren-tit standing on tiptoes could just reach up to it. The leakage was almost imperceptible, but it was enough for a sip or two every now and again. Apparently a special pair and their young—or perhaps friends—claimed ownership to this hydrant, and visited it frequently when indulging in pepper berries. Any person having the temerity to place himself within five or six feet of this private drinking place was sure to receive a terrific scolding from the whilom owners, but by moving my chair gradually and keeping very quiet I succeeded in sitting not over three feet away without preventing the birds from making use of it, tho they always made a good deal of fuss before approaching and never tarried very

long in such close proximity to man. I tried to get a photograph of one standing on tiptoes and stretching his neck to reach up for a drop, but the sun did not strike the spot until its rays were too weak to get anything satisfactory and all my attempts were failures.

Yet bright as these wren-tits seemed in some ways they showed a good deal of stupidity, in common with several other species, in another way. The Indian mortar shown in the cut of my first attempt at photographing birds (THE CONDOR, Vol. VII, No. 6, p. 179) was much resorted to by many birds; but as the summer waned and the sun southerned it was too much in the shade for the use of the camera, except for a very little while in the afternoon when perhaps a mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos leucomelas*) might happen along in a thirsty mood at the proper moment when the sun struck it, most of the others coming too early or too late for the sunshine. I conceived the idea of putting another mortar, this one being too heavy to move, a short distance away but in the sun for some hours at a stretch—



WREN-TITS GETTING READY TO BATHE

and leading the water to it. This new mortar was placed about four feet away from, but in plain sight of the old one, and yet the customary visitors could not become accustomed to the change for a long while. They would come to the old place, jump into the bowl tho not a drop of water was in it, jump out again, stand on the edge and appear perplexed only to repeat the whole performance over and over again; and yet they would not go to the new place but four feet off where the water was dripping musically all day long. Some individuals would hop down into the old mortar and go thru the motions of taking a bath, actually raising dust from the dry sediment as they fluttered their wings, and did not have sense enough to know better, apparently. At first this holding aloof from the new watering place struck me as being perhaps due to fear of it, but this was not really the case as there was nothing there to cause such a feeling, and the only conclusion possible was that it was either dense stupidity on the part of the birds or else utter inability to believe that such a change in conditions could have taken place.

The wren-tits were the first to get accustomed to the new state of affairs, but

even they would take a drink at the new bowl and then hurry back to the old one two or three times before they would decide to take a regular bath in the new. In the cut (the third in this article) the queer perpendicular line at the right shoulder of the bird showing full front is a drop falling from the bamboo used to lead the water from the hydrant.

In another part of the grounds was a small mortar under the drip of a faucet which was mostly in the shade. This was on a lawn under some large pine trees, where there were chairs, a hammock, etc., and usually people reading or chatting in rather close proximity to it; and yet it was a much sought-after watering and bathing place for certain birds. The bowl was comparatively deep tho of small diameter, and the smaller visitors performed their ablutions rather hurriedly in consequence, their actions giving one the idea of falling in and scrambling out again time after time. As they could not touch bottom with their feet this was in fact just what they did, tho of course not by accident.

The most interesting frequenter of this particular spot was a Pasadena thrasher (*Toxostoma redivivum pasadenense*). Somehow one not living in the habitat of thrashers does not associate them with such things as baths, after meeting them principally out on sage-brush plains and far away from all water; and it always gave me a feeling of surprise to see one of these birds which had grown comparatively tame in the garden, giving himself the luxury of a cold plunge. He would not pay any attention to a person sitting quietly twenty-five or thirty feet away, tho always on the alert for any movement or approach on the part of the observer.

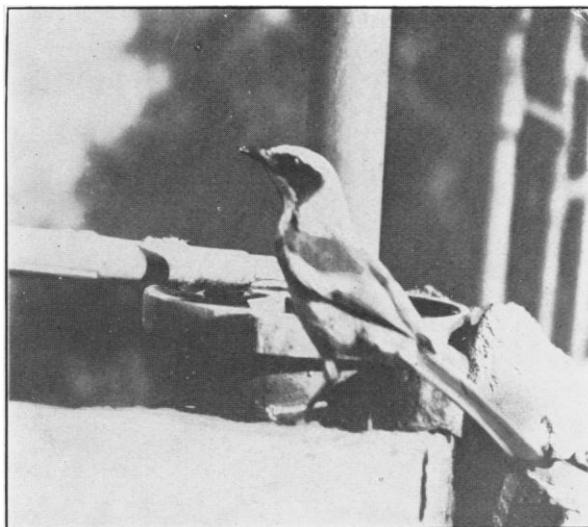
On several occasions I came upon him suddenly as he was whacking away with his curved bill, making the dirt fly as he sought some dainty tid-bit in the loose earth of the garden bed, and it was comical to see him make a jump for the nearest protection, no matter how ridiculously inadequate it might be. Once, for instance, I came upon him at a distance of not over ten feet, when he immediately jumped for the stem of a rose bush not more than three quarters of an inch in diameter and perfectly straight. He snuggled up close behind this and seemed to believe himself absolutely hidden as he made no effort to move until I approached to half the distance when he darted away. Whether it was only one individual of this species in the garden or more than I constantly saw, there was no means of telling, but there were never two seen at once, and I believed that there was only one. Even late in the fall he would perch in the top of a tree and sing most gloriously.

In September some mockingbirds arrived and tried to rival our thrasher's song, and many times none of us dense mortals could distinguish which bird was giving us such a treat, many small bets being made as to the identity of the songsters. I seldom was sure myself unless I had my eye fixed on the performer.

Once in a vacant lot nearby I heard a thrasher singing away on the top of a live oak, when some California woodpeckers alighted in the top of a neighboring sycamore and commenced their queer chattering to each other. Immediately I noticed a refrain in the thrasher's song which was a good imitation of the woodpeckers' notes. This seemed to please him so much that even after the woodpeckers had ceased their chatter and had flown away he kept repeating the imitation, weaving it in and out of his song, as it were. Wishing to be dead sure of the identity of the songster I crept close up to the tree and had the satisfaction of watching Mr. Thrasher for some minutes before he espied me. One of my great regrets of the past summer is that the above mentioned bathing place of the thrasher was so much in the shade

that it was impossible to get a photograph of him without a focal plane shutter, which I could not find in the town. Well, some other time—perhaps!

In contra-distinction to the experiment of changing the watering place of the birds was one of educating them up to a better one without changing its location. Along a stone wall supporting a road in an unoccupied place adjoining, was a hydrant that dripped very, very slightly; yet it was near the top of a low ridge and not much below the tops of some trees where birds could conveniently alight to rest from their wanderings. I procured a common shallow kitchen bowl, put it on the low wall and had just elevation enough to get water to it from the faucet by a piece of bamboo. Birds had long been in the habit of coming to this faucet and hanging there long enough to get a sip or two of water before giving place to the next comer. There was no shelter for the observer near, but I rigged up one by means of a clothes horse covered with some old matting and fastened to the iron railing which ran along the wall, and let the birds get used to it. In this instance they soon overcame their fear, and as the bowl was in plain sight to all



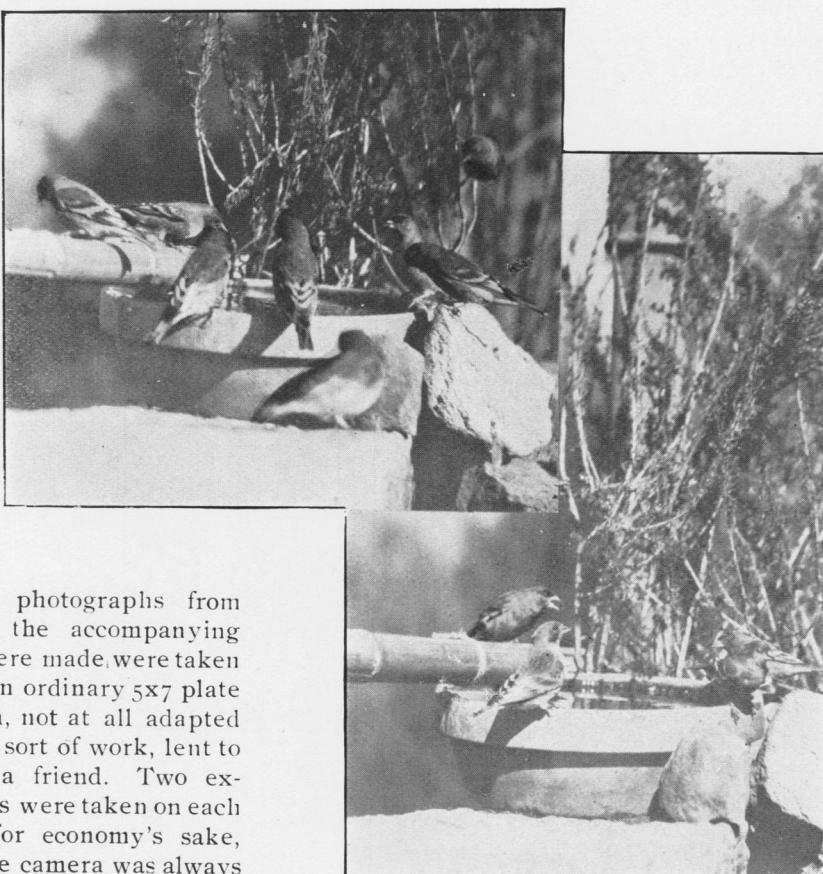
CALIFORNIA JAY

avian passers-by it was not long before it had a host of customers. These were principally green-backed goldfinches and house finches tho occasionally some other species would drop in. One Anthony towhee was a regular patron and used to hold possession for ten or fifteen minutes at a time while more timid customers waited patiently around for him to give them a chance.

A California jay (*Aphelocoma californica*) visited the spot once in a while after the bowl was established there and I had the good fortune to get a pretty fair snap at him one morning, tho he was a little too near the camera to get the best result. He was so wary, however, that it was a case of then or never. He came again several times while the camera was set and I was ready for him, but the glint of the metal parts always seemed to make him suspicious, and never again did he stay long enough or get in a sufficiently favorable position for another snap.

As the iron railing made of 2-inch pipe was very unsightly in a picture it seemed feasible to decorate the perpendicular portion in the center of the background with sage-brush and get the visitors accustomed to so distinct a change.

This was accomplished gradually by adding a twig or two day by day and with better results artistically. By the time, however, that all this education was finished—and it was as much an education to me as to the birds—and delayed as it was by the complete destruction of my paraphernalia by a violent gale, the days were growing short and cool and the visitors came not only less frequently but too early in the morning or too late in the afternoon for any photography, and the work had to be abandoned.



The photographs from which the accompanying cuts were made were taken with an ordinary 5x7 plate camera, not at all adapted to this sort of work, lent to me by a friend. Two exposures were taken on each plate for economy's sake, and the camera was always set at a distance of four feet from the center of the bowl or mortar, as that was the nearest distance at which it would do fairly good work. While claiming no merit for these cuts they seemed of sufficient interest in the matter of the subject to warrant publishing, and I do so in the hope that others will follow out the idea of working up what can be done in this line in a dry country.

GREEN-BACKED GOLDFINCHES

*San Francisco, California.*